

ARTTALK

War and Masterpieces

Michelangelo's *David* sealed inside a brick capsule. The Winged Victory of Samothrace rolled down the steps of the Louvre on rickety wooden planks.

Leonardo's *Last Supper* buffered by scaffolding and sandbags. These drastic measures, taken during World War II to secure Europe's great treasures, are revisited in *The Rape of Europa* from Actual Films.

Written, produced, and directed by Richard Berge, Bonni Cohen, and Nicole Newnham, the documentary tells through pictures and interviews the story that Lynn H. Nicholas related in her 1994 book of the same name. She told how Hitler dreamed of building an art museum in his hometown of Linz, Austria, to house masterpieces looted from occupied Europe.

"Never before had art been moved, hidden, and plundered on such a large scale," says narrator Joan Allen in the documentary, which can be seen on the 7th of this month at MASS MoCA in

North Adams, Massachusetts, and on the 8th at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

From Poland to Russia, the documentary follows the German army's destructive path—and relates the ways in which local residents tried to stay one step ahead of the invaders. Masterpieces from the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków, such as Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*, were hidden at a country estate. The Louvre was emptied of most of its treasures, including the Mona Lisa, which was transported from Paris to the first of its five hiding places in southern France in an ambulance.

Many of the documentary's historic photographs also appear in the book *Rescuing Da Vinci*, compiled by co-producer Robert M. Edsel and published by Laurel. The pictures take readers into the



Preparing to return Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine* to Kraków, Poland.

Netherlands, a country not visited in the film, and show Rembrandt's *Night Watch* (1642) rolled up like a carpet.

The unsung heroes of the massive rescue effort, says Edsel, are the "Monuments Men," experts brought in by the U.S. Army to ensure the proper handling of artworks. Lieutenant Bernard Taper worked to recover objects from Hermann Göring's pri-

vate hoard, much of which was abandoned at the end of the war in a train transporting it from France to Germany. Peasants raided the cars looking for schnapps, and those who were too late to find any alcohol "had to be satisfied with whatever they could put their hands on," Taper says in the film, "like 15th-century paintings."

—Julie Brener



LOOKING SHARP "I'll take the sculpture, page 88." That's what one well-heeled shopper might say after perusing this year's Neiman Marcus Christmas Book. Among the catalogue's "extraordinary gifts"—like a chartered space flight and his-and-hers emission-free commuter vehicles—is *Bonded Activity #55 (Skyscraper)*, a seven-foot-tall building crafted from thousands of precision-sharpened No. 2 pencils by The Art Guys.

The Houston-based duo, Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, were invited to participate in the catalogue by the luxury retailer's vice president of corporate communications, Ginger Reeder. "We'll exhibit in a museum or gallery," says Galbreth, "but we're interested in showing outside the art world, too."

Massing describes the 1999 artwork as a "piece of fantasy architecture very loosely based on Cesar Pelli's Malaysian Petronas Towers, which actually resemble an Art Guys pencil sculpture." The one-of-a-kind gift, which comes with its framed study from the pair's ongoing series "101 of the World's Greatest Sculpture Proposals," is \$40,000, while smaller 20-inch tabletop versions cost \$6,000, delivery not included. The retailer will collect 10 percent of the sales price.

The building is pictured in the catalogue with a sock monkey hanging from its main spire, mischievously removing a pencil. "If you really love him," the caption assures, "we'll make sure you get one like it with your purchase." —Catherine D. Anson

A composite photo of an Art Guys sculpture from the Neiman Marcus catalogue.

TOP: NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION; COLLEGE PARK; BOTTOM: ©2006 NEIMAN MARCUS